

## IMPRESSIONS IN THE MEDIEVAL COURT AT THE GREAT EXHIBITION.

THE late exhibition of the productions of various nations will be rendered most beneficial to the progress of the arts of design in this country, if artists unreservedly communicate the impressions they have received, and their opinions formed on them; and as this unprecedented assemblage of objects of all styles should be regarded as the means of judging their comparative merits, and of testing the truth of existing theories, it is of the utmost importance to the future improvement of the arts that the opinions should be stated freely. To form a true and unbiased judgment, I believe it to be essential that our first impressions should receive more attention and careful examination than we usually bestow on them, being often stronger, more correct, and freer from prejudice than our after-thoughts.

In accordance with the above views, I venture to state that my first impression of the Medieval Court was one of disappointment, and that the forms therein displayed appeared poor and monotonous, compared with the forms of the renaissance and cinquecento styles in the other part of the building. Having previously been sensible of the beauties of mediæval architecture, I first imagined that these impressions were caused by the inferiority of design in the various objects in that style, but subsequent examinations having enabled me to render more justice to their beauty and the ability shown in their design, have also confirmed an opinion that the style, as hitherto developed, does not possess the beauty, richness, and variety of form to be found in other styles, though capable of that possession. This comparative poverty and monotony I believe to arise from the limited use of the principal and most beautiful forms in nature, or those forms that the eye naturally singles out, dwells on, and returns to.

The sphere is used in the mighty works of creation, and convex surfaces of regular and irregular spherical or ellipsoidal character are found in most beautiful objects: convex surfaces of the above nature receive more variety and richness from the effect of light, shade, and reflection than any other form, and may often be left plain and unadorned: Indeed, their beauty is often lessened and marred by injudicious attempts at embellishment. In natural objects we often find these plain surfaces forming centres of composition surrounded, enriched, and contrasted by stronger marked forms, as the forehead, cheeks, and other portions of the human figure, the imitation of which are the chief beauties available to the sculptor, and are often heightened by the additional strongly marked folds of drapery. We also find these surfaces occasionally enriched by deep cuttings or projections; and the partial imitation of the above beauties gave a richness to the sculptured figures, capitals, bases, and other details of the architecture of the latter part of the thirteenth century and the principal portion of the fourteenth, not to be found at other periods of mediæval architecture in this country. Had the above forms been more freely developed, and connected by the cylindrical forms existing in the columns, mouldings, &c., with the beautiful enriched flat surfaces of the period, a style equal in beauty and richness to any other would have arisen; but unfortunately a change came, in which surfaces of all kinds, spherical, cylindrical, and plane, were gradually sacrificed to lines, even the sculptured figures being rendered angular, meagre, and unnatural to agree. This ended in the stiff, cramped, and comparatively poor perpendicular style, to which the freedom of the renaissance was a welcome relief.

Mr. Wormum states in his lecture on the art of sculpture in the Exhibition,—"There was the Greek style developed to some extent, the Oriental or Byzantine, a tolerable sprinkling of Cinquecento, a little Elizabethan, an immense quantity of Louis Quatorze, and some Rococo." How can we account for the predominance of that unmeaning and incongruous style of Louis Quatorze, except that it allowed

the introduction of all forms, and thereby possesses a richness supposed unobtainable in other styles.

Not believing, in the present intercourse of nations, the possibility of any new, strongly-marked, individual, national style arising, I yet hope that as our architects have latterly generally selected the style of the best period of our mediæval art for imitation in their designs; by their greater freedom in the judicious introduction and adaptation of forms seeking the types in nature, and not sacrificing the beauties of sculpture and painting to imaginary trimmings, we may see the style most peculiar to our country arrive at a perfection it has not hitherto reached.

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## FOREIGN ARCHITECTURAL AND ARTISTICAL INTELLIGENCE.

**Cemetery Laws in France.**—In the year 1850, 22,306 persons were buried in the three cemeteries,—de l'Est, du Nord, and du Sud, at Paris. Of these, 15,792 were thrown into the common pit (*fosse commune*), holes, measuring 80 metres by about 4. Here human bodies are sunk (!) without any separation but that of the deal boards between them, and these sinks are not filled with earth until quite full of the bodies of the dead! But all this is done in violation not only of human sentiment, but even of positive law, because Napoleon (whose mind reached everywhere) enacted an especial *Décret*, 23 *Prarial*, an xii., where the principle is laid down, that every person shall be enabled to weep (*pleurer*) on the ashes of his relatives or friends, and to place thereon memorials, however frail and trivial. Art. 6 states, "that for avoiding a too close succession of burials, the opening of the graves shall not take place but every fifth year." For effecting this, the sites allotted for inhumation have to be *five times* as large, as the annual number of burials will render necessary. Hence, therefore, the poorest person has not only the right to a separate place of repose, but to one that will remain intact for several years. Arts. 10 and 11 of the same law speak of the further concessions of space or time, which can be obtained by those who will purchase them by making donations or provisions to hospitals or the poor, besides a sum to be given to the commune. Art. 4 states positively that every inhumation shall take place in a separate grave (*fosse séparée*), whose dimensions are thus ordered:—"The grave to have a depth of 1 met. 5 cent. to 2 metres, and a width of 8 centim.; and shall be filled up with well-sifted earth as soon as the body has been deposited therein." Art. 5 states, that the graves shall be not nearer to each other than from 3 to 4 centim. at the sides, and at top and bottom from 3 to 5 centim. This law of Napoleon may be considered as the *Magna Charta of the dead in France*,—a real *habeas corpus*!

**Painting on Slabs of Lava.**—There have been executed at Berlin three pictures by Professor Klöber, for the Russian church near Putadam. They are painted on lava (?) for resisting even the influence of the most severe weather.

**Annuity Society for the Working Classes.**—The "Caisse Générale de Retraite," in Brussels, founded by the law of May 8, 1850, has come into activity on the 1st of May last. The plan for the especial building, to be erected for the officers of the establishment, &c., has been sanctioned by the jury of fine arts, and an architect, M. Cluysinaer, entrusted therewith. Every person subsisting by labour (*work !*), is enabled to procure an annuity for after life, whose minimum is fixed at 27, the maximum at 720 fr. Every workman, after he has attained the age of 18, can enter the society, and stipulate whether his annuity has to commence at having attained the age of 55, 60, or 65, according to which the scale of payment varies. Accidents entitle to immediate relief, if the subscriber becomes thereby disabled to work, and has paid five years' subscription. Very indigent families receive also a burial allowance of 20 fr.

**Improvements in Paris.**—According to the *Traité*, the jury of expropriation, which is to

fix the indemnities to be allotted to the owners of houses and land required for the prolongation of the Rue de Rivoli, were to meet on the 14th inst. The part of the new street which is to be formed by means of expropriation is comprised between the Rue des Poullies (Place de l'Oratoire du Louvre) and the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. The jury will also decide on the indemnities to be paid to tenants who hold leases. The number of houses to be expropriated is 80, and the offers will amount to 7,215,000fr. Notices to quit in January next have already been given to 676 tenants. It is expected that the demolitions will commence in the early part of February. The enlargement of the Rue St. Avoise and des Mathurins St. Jacques is going on rapidly. More than 200 tenants have received notice to quit in January. The above operations will cost the city of Paris 9,000,000fr., the payment of which will be made in December next.

## NEW STREETS.

## EXTENSION OF FARRINGTON-STREET.

WE manage these things very badly, of this matter would not have remained in abeyance some thirteen years, and the surrounding property desolate. I think the fact is significant enough, and demonstrates most forcibly the want of some Central Board for Metropolitan Improvements. It is currently reported that matters as regards the new street will remain in *status quo* until the expiration of two years from this time, when Smithfield market shall have been finally disposed of. The inhabitants of Smithfield think their existence guaranteed for two years, in consequence of the silly Government time afforded them for consideration, the serving of notices and their expiration, and are now making their calculations accordingly.

One word as regards the Holborn ravine. A great improvement would be effected by taking down the houses on the south side of Holborn-hall, and building the viaduct on their site; this would get rid of the awkward angle formed by the present line of street and leave it intact, and also bring Newgate-street into a direct line with Holborn. How much longer is this gigantic nuisance to disgrace the metropolis of the greatest city in the world. A tenth-rate railway company would have solved the question twenty times over.

## ARCHITECTURE.

## RAILWAY JOTTINGS.

THE metropolitan stations have been literally choked up with passengers of late, and it would appear that immense as was the influx during the last week of the International Exhibition, it would have been much greater had not the limits of the railway carrying powers been actually surpassed. At Bath, for instance, tickets were bought up, and the Great Western ceased issuing more from sheer want of the means of conveyance, and many of those sold were re-sold at a high premium. Trains of 2,000 and 3,000 passengers on the different lines became quite common,—and, indeed, it would take a good few trains even of such dimensions to make up the daily hatch of 100,000 and 110,000 for the Exhibition—for even the foreign visitors mostly came of course by rail, and must have very greatly contributed to make up the magnificent sum total. With reference to the duty alleged to be chargeable on excursion trains, Herapath denies the Government right to any such duty, and states, that even though a duty were exigible, it would not be a poll-tax, but only 2 per cent. on the receipts of the first and second-class passengers, or, as the Inland Revenue officers proposed, 5 per cent. on first-class receipts.—The parish of St. Pancras, which lately shut up her Majesty's highway, against even her Majesty herself, on her way to the north, has lately "seized the North-Western Railway" for poor-rates. The company dispute the amount due, which the vestry rate at 1,000d., and upwards. One of the parochial brokers took formal possession of the Euston station. How he managed the business in such stirring times on the leviathan line does not appear;